

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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LAND DONATION TO BECOME NATIONAL AMERICAN BALD EAGLE SANCTUARY

Control over more than 1,000 acres of land in South Dakota and Nebraska that will serve as a sanctuary for the American bald eagle was turned over to Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service on December 19 in a ceremony at the National Wildlife Federation's headquarters in Washington, D.C.

The land was donated jointly by the National Wildlife Federation and the 7-Eleven Food Stores Division of the Southland Corporation of Dallas, Texas, as the climax of a special fund raising campaign, "Save a Living Thing."

Interior's Under Secretary, John C. Whitaker, accepted the deed for the Department and then turned it over to Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the agency that will manage the land as a new national wildlife refuge.

The Under Secretary announced that the refuge will be named for the late Senator Karl E. Mundt of South Dakota who strongly supported the Endangered Species Act of 1966. He also presented Thomas L. Kimball, Executive Vice President of the National Wildlife Federation, with a letter of appreciation from President Ford. The President wrote:

"I regret I am unable to join you for the ceremonies marking our acceptance of a new National Wildlife Refuge in South Dakota.

"This generous gift is an outstanding demonstration of cooperative volunteer action by all those involved. It is entirely fitting that the bald eagle, our national symbol, should be the immediate beneficiary of your gift, especially in view of its current survival problems.

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"On behalf of the American people, I thank all of you who have worked to make this donation. I hope that your action will serve as a model for others to follow."

"Save a Living Thing" was a four-month-long campaign run by Southland Corporation with the help of the National Wildlife Federation in which Southland donated one cent from the sale of each "Slurpee" drink in its 7-Eleven stores to a special fund for the land purchase. Each of the non-throwaway cups portrayed an "endangered species" and carried a brief description of the animal. The money raised from the sale of the crushed-ice drinks, added to donations received by Southland and the National Wildlife Federation, totaled more than \$200,000.

Earlier in the day, Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton said, "I am pleased to know that once again private industry and conservation-minded citizens, acting through the National Wildlife Federation, have together made a lasting contribution to the Nation. It is fitting that this sanctuary, which serves as a winter home for nearly 15 percent of the bald eagles found in the lower 48 States, be named after the late Senator Karl E. Mundt of South Dakota. Senator Mundt's keen awareness of the need to protect our dwindling wildlife populations helped inspire a historic piece of legislation in the first Endangered Species Act, and his work in that area will long be remembered."

The conveyance includes title to 818 acres purchased through the National Wildlife Federation, plus a conservation easement of about 300 acres. About 19 acres of the refuge area is in Nebraska; all of the remaining acreage is in South Dakota. The refuge's Missouri River bottomland, with its tall cottonwood trees, is a winter sanctuary for as many as 300 bald eagles each year. Other local wildlife includes white-tailed deer, bobwhite quail, wild turkey, fox, coyote, opossum, raccoon, and sometimes a bobcat.

Although it is not officially an "endangered species," the northern bald eagle population has been greatly reduced in recent years. Pesticide pollution and habitat destruction have plagued eagles, primarily in the lower 48 States, and estimates now show about 1,000 nesting pairs. "It is hoped that by providing such a sanctuary as the Karl E. Mundt NWR—a protected resting area for the eagles—that their population will no longer decline at such a rapid pace," said Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

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